

## LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *“The conduct” of an academic institution has suffered a permanent change under external pressure and criticism for its failure to adapt to current social and economic requirements. The degradation of quality in the Romanian education system is a current affairs subject. Successive and rather incoherent reforms suggest the lack of a long-term vision, as well as that of a political consensus on the role and place of education within the Romanian economy and society. The reference points identified as a result of the needs analysis and the student opinion polls have indicated the necessity to focus the academic teaching and learning activities on the student, on their level of development, using active-participative strategies, using a specific academic group management and applying various evaluation techniques focused on the student’s performance and his acquired competences. All of these elements signal, at the level of institutional strategic decisions, a direction towards the improvement of professional development of the teaching staff, one concentrated on education quality and performance. The modern school of leadership is based on applied methods, the delegation of responsibilities, regulation of centralized-decentralized relations, research and creativity development and the reinforcement of psychological and social aspects. Unlike management, considered to be a formal and institutionalized type of leadership, leadership is perceived as a process carried out at an informal group level, while the leader as a boss is someone who leads this group.*

**Key words:** *academic institution, successive reforms, management, leadership, strategic decisions.*

### 1. Introduction

In the paper *Management: Theory and Practice*, published in 1990, Gerard A. Cole presents one of the most synthetic and clear definitions of the leadership activity as *“a dynamic process within a group, in which an individual influences other to voluntarily contribute to the fulfilment of the groups’ tasks, in a given situation”*.

In other words, this position refers to the promotion of behaviours nurturing the achievement of organisational objectives,

motivating the staff by: using various leadership styles, a quality of interpersonal relationships, the manner in which communication and cooperation are favoured within the organisation and the staff is engaged in the decision-making process.

Leadership and management represent separate dimensions of the people in charge. Leadership is about the capacity to determine people to act; the manager, however, is the person who makes sure that the organisational objectives are achieved, by

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planning, organizing and directing the work towards its conclusion [2].

Unlike management, considered to be more of a formal, institutionalised type of leading, leadership is perceived as leading at an informal group level, and the leader as the one who leads this group; it represents the ability to influence others towards the fulfilment of the tasks [12].

B. P. Smith defines "leadership" as "that part of a manager's activity by which he influences the behaviour of individuals and groups in order to achieve the desired outcome".

P. F. Drucker (1954): leadership - to do what needs to be done, management - to do things the right way.

"Manager" and "leader" are two concepts used sometimes as synonyms, but distinguished by specifics. "Manager" and "leader" are metaphors for the two extremities of a continuum. The "manager" tends to represent the extremity of the continuum focused on aspects such as: analytical, structured, controlled, deliberate, ordered, while the "leader" tends to represent the focus on the: visionary, experimental, flexible and creative aspects.

The manager is the one who uses his mind to solve the prospective and the current problems of the organisation he leads; the leader is the character who brings emotion to the leadership activity while trying to solve the same problems; the manager's mind is concerned with setting a strategy, the leader's spirit is invested in its implementation and towards building an organisational culture.

The manager's mind is constantly alert to potential perils that may determine the failure of the proposed strategy, while the leader uses his resources to make the most out of the opportunities presented by the activity. The leader has the tendency to look deep into the future, enthusiastically and full of creativity and the manager is carefully analysing each step towards the future.

The manager tends to be more concerned with the actual results of the laid out strategy, while the leader believes that the satisfaction drawn from the activity itself represents more than its result (especially its material aspect). The manager tends to preserve the resources of the organisation, to use them in a sensible manner, while the leader is accustomed to taking a risk.

Leadership refers to a person's capacity to lead by making reference to the natural and spontaneous in-born aspects of the leadership act, while management refers to the act of administration, the formal, institutional aspects of leading. Management too refers to the ability to work with people (which is essential for a leader), but in this case, the purpose is organisational, the ability thus serving as means to achieving organisational objectives. The leader is more in pursuit of individual purposes and personal visions. Quite often, these coincide with those of the organisation; that will be the case of a very good manager-leader. If the manager has leader qualities, these can be spotted in the organisational performance and the atmosphere he creates.

Even if the new theories seem to suggest that managers should be, as Hickman noticed, more oriented towards the specific aspects of a leader, the author disagrees with this tendency. He considers the two sides (rational and emotional) as preserving rather important resources for the leadership activity, as complementary, joining their strengths and mutually minimising their weaknesses, tending towards what can be metaphorically represented by the expression of getting results as "one plus one equals three".

In a comparative analysis of management-leadership we may highlight that managers administer, leaders innovate; managers act in a transformational manner while leaders do so in a transactional one.

Leadership is a form of psychological leading, while management is about administrative leading. The former is associated with the cognitive, imaginative level and anticipation while the latter with action [11], [12]. The leader is the one scanning the future, setting goals and action plans, while the manager implements them.

## 2. Typologies of management styles

The most popular typology is the one produced by K. Lewin, R. Lippit and R.K.White, who describe three styles characterised by the relationship between managers and their subordinates [8], [11].

Practice in the domain of educational services highlights the three big, already traditional, categories of leadership:

a) *The authoritarian type* – belongs to the traditional concept, builds on the premise that it is necessary and useful to use coercing measures to motivate the subordinates involved in an activity, leading to frustration, stagnation and resistance from the organisation members; the direct consequence will be translated in their preference to be tightly led, avoiding responsibility, restricting to a limited area and avoiding personal initiatives. This type of leadership is prone to conflicts, situations taking their toll on the staff, but also on the beneficiaries requesting the services of that organisation;

The authoritarian style generates individualism and hostility and a high level of dissatisfaction (in plain sight or not).

b) *The democratic and participative type*, is based on a set of fundamental principles: staff adhering to the purpose and objectives of the organisation; subordinates taking on more responsibilities, in the case of participative management; valorisation of the imagination, creativity and innovative spirit of the entire staff. The democratic

style nurtures a warm, open environment based on friendly relations where the team spirit is highly developed.

c) *The laissez-faire type* (permissive, indifferent), is characterised by hesitation, a pending attitude, neutrality towards management problems and conflictual situations within the organisation.

K. Davis draws up the following classification of management styles [7]: the autocratic, participative manager.

Likert identifies four management styles:

a) Exploitative authoritative, the manager who does not trust his subordinates, is in power, control and uses threats, punishments, monopolises decision while subordinates from lower levels are rarely involved in decision making;

b) Benevolent authoritative, supports consultation opportunities, and the subordinates are somewhat involved in decision making,

c) Democratic consultative, supports interaction, motivates through rewards, trusts its subordinates, upward and downward communication, lesser important decisions are made by subordinates;

d) Democratic participative, the manager treats with respect and interest its subordinates, has total confidence in them, decision making is highly decentralised, in a favourable environment based on respect.

Other authors talk about a continuum of management styles: dictatorial and the professor manager [11].

Education has, as an objective and subjective purpose, the human being, so any education act must have at least two dimensions: the learning task and the human relationship [4], [5].

Thus appears another continuum of management styles, where one can identify four fundamental styles: directing style, tutoring style, mentoring style, delegator style.

In practice there is another type of leader, a very interesting kind, known as the

charismatic leader; someone who by sheer force of style and personal skills is capable of exercising a tremendous influence over his employees, thus imposing himself through self-confidence, contaminating others with a spirit of order and respect for ethical norms, generating excitement and strengthening the employees' hopes in his vision of the future.

Managers from the superior level must become leaders in the promotion of quality, ensuring an agreement between the purpose and the internal environment of the organisation, creating another kind of environment where people can get fully invested in the achievement of organisation objectives.

Carrying out their activity with responsibility, leaders are essential in setting a system of values and ethical norms that can be respected at the level of the organisation, ensuring the resources and freedom to act for the entire staff.

Another perspective on leadership comes from the work of Gert Hofstede [3], on cultural differences in different nations.

In his studies he discovered four dimensions (later six) where national cultures can differ: "Power distance", "Individualism vs. collectivism", "Masculinity vs. femininity" and "Uncertainty avoidance". The fifth dimension is long term vs. short term orientation, and the sixth is "Indulgence vs. restraint". Two smaller samples of research in academic library leadership in Norway and Romania have been published [6], [10], taking into account Hofstede's groundbreaking theories. Norway and Romania score quite differently on Hofstede's dimensions, especially for Power Distance (Norway is ranked as 69-70 of 76 and Romania as 7th place of 76) and Uncertainty Avoidance (Norway ranked as 59 of 76 and Romania as 14) [3]. According to data from a survey of Norwegian library leaders, there is high degree of agreement with

participative decision making in Norwegian academic libraries. Staff has a large influence and agreement is seen as important for the library leaders. In Romania, agreement is important, but not to such a high degree. According to Repanovici and Landøy:

"Romanian leaders in academic libraries rely more on their academic knowledge and understanding, while Norwegian leaders think of their formal position as a more significant influence than the Romanians do. This is probably because the Romanian library directors are recognized as academics in their universities, and therefore consider themselves as just as much academic staff as library directors. This is also in accordance with their educational background, where the Romanian leaders to a much higher degree are PhD holders (from other academic disciplines) and not in LIS. For both groups of leaders the possibilities to punish and reward are seen as less significant". [6]

The small studies of differences among academic library leaders, when they are investigated through cultural theory, point to another aspect that may be considered when discussing leadership and management in higher education.

### **3. Importance of education and educational cooperation**

In social and human development, the education factor is known to be a vital element in the adjustment of individuals to the challenges of the new millennium. At the same time, one must admit that sharing values and belonging to a common social and cultural space is necessary in consolidating the status of a citizen of Europe. The importance of education and educational cooperation in the development and consolidation of a stable,

democratic and peaceful society is universally acknowledged.

Dominated by these considerations, The Sorbonne Declaration of the European Universities Association (EUA) from 25 of May 1998 brings forth the central role of academic institutions in the development of European cultural dimensions. There is a focus on creating a European space for higher education, as a key means to promote mobility for young graduates of higher education and the possibility to gain employment anywhere on the continent, thus ensuring their own development. Several European countries have accepted the invitation to get involved in achieving the objectives set in the Declaration, by signing it or by expressing their agreement in principle. The course of various reforms in higher education, launched at the same time in Europe, has proven the determination of several governments to act on it. European higher education institutions have accepted the challenge of playing an important role in building a European space for higher education, and in the implementation of Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum principles from 1988.

This is extremely important, since the independence and autonomy of universities ensures the continuous adjustment of higher education and research systems to the ever changing needs and requirements of society and scientific progress.

In order to ensure a better compatibility and comparison of higher education systems one needs to preserve a permanent concern for their accomplishment.

A significant objective highlighted was the one aiming to increase the international competitiveness of European systems of higher education. It has been stated that the vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be gauged by the manner in which its culture attracts the interest of other countries. In this context arises the engagement of competent authorities in

providing support for the coordination of the policies mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration regarding the establishment of a European space all over the world.

#### **4. Higher Education in the European Union**

One of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy is that 40% of European young people be graduates of higher education. Among the European Union countries with the most spectacular increase in the rate of higher education graduates is Romania, with more than 91% in 2010. This might be explained by an easy access to higher education, owing to a low level of school fees, stimulated also by the difference in income between those with higher education studies and those with secondary education. Thus, one has the opportunity of returning the investment within a very short time span.

The use of modern tendencies in education facilitates transition from the traditional education model, conducted in class, to a more personalized content and learner control over the training process.

It is also quite clear the fact that using modern tendencies in education nurtures new relations between institutions, professors, community, workplace, family and the learner. The global balance of education has changed from a closed-in pedagogical approach, coordinated by institutions, tightly controlled by the professor, with passive students and a minimal involvement of parents and the community, to a more open and transparent one, integrated within society, supporting student initiative, collaboration, questioning, interrogation, competences, personal skills and continuous learning. By placing the student at the heart of this new training model, one can see a change in focus in education from content to context of training.

In order for it to be successful, new educational technologies-assisted learning must facilitate the creation of new learning

models, based on the idea of learning communities, involving more than the acquisition of competence: emotional involvement of the student in the learning process, transforming thus the educational experience into a fond memory one is willing to relive.

Whether and to what extent conventional universities will adopt the new models and technologies for education and training will depend on their positioning on the education market. With a higher fragmentation of education institutions expected in Europe in the next 10 years, it will also depend on the chosen strategy for the implementation of new technologies in the learning process.

### **5. Quality management in Higher Education institutions**

Quality represents an internal attribute of each material or immaterial object, reflecting the degree of agreement with the specified or implied requirements of the beneficiary.

The quality of a university (organisational quality) is determined by the quality of the processes taking place at the university and the quality of the services offered.

According to P. Scott, the objectives of educational systems are the discovery, preservation, dissemination and application of scientific knowledge. These objectives are achieved by means of the teaching process, the scientific research process and a series of other services specific to higher education institutions (the quality of the teaching process, the quality of the scientific research activity, the quality of other services provided by the university).

In most of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe any debate on the management of higher education quality takes into consideration the accreditation.

Quality management means the existence of a proper organisational structure that allows the implementation of the quality system.

### **6. Manager and Leader**

In speciality papers Leadership is defined as a process in which a person sets a goal or a direction for a group of individuals and, through competence and persuasion, determines them to act together, towards the achievement of the proposed mission [9].

Leadership, conceived as a management monitoring position, manifests itself when an individual influences the achievement of objectives by others, playing a key role when confronted with a new problem; the leader is the one that offers better solutions and creates a secure atmosphere leading the people towards a new form.

The manager rules, the leader is followed by the people. The true leader holds power and exercises its influence for what it represents; it represents an attribute desired and sought after by organisations. Leaders trust their own forces and generate confidence in others.

Leaders are capable of guiding students, creating a vision that they communicate to them; they are self-confident and in turn inspire confidence; they have enough experience to see mistakes as another detour from the road to success; around them people feel stronger, more competent and confident, and they find the activity to be more interesting and challenging.

Successful leaders are more interested in certain leadership activities, such as planning or training; have more confidence in their employees and a strong focus on people.

In the education field this position is essential. Students preparing for real life need a model they can follow. A member of the teaching staff displaying leader qualities can be the one.

The problems of leadership are complex and represent a focal point for decades now, specialists being interested in discovering who are those people with the capacity to imprint their vision on the organisation and to influence their

important activities; and whether these qualities are natural or may be developed by means of training.

In an interview by Rich Karlgaard in Forbes Magazine in November 2004 ("Peter Drucker on leadership"), he states that successful and efficient leaders ask themselves: "What needs to be done?" and not "What do I want to do?" And "Of those things that would make a difference, which are right for me?" meaning what are they good at. Efficient leaders refrain from doing things they know they are not good at. They make sure however that these necessities get done by others who are qualified and they are not afraid of strength in other people. It is all about delegating the managerial position. There are leaders who fail because they do not make the best of the competences they have and do not delegate tasks when necessary [9].

Efficient leaders know when to stop allocating resources for things that have not yet achieved their goal and are no longer of any use. One must know when to let go.

Successful leaders communicate and students know what the leader is going to do. They have a purpose, have a set mission and know when to say "No".

It is efficient to know how to say "No" and to stand by it.

The strategic project "Quality and Leadership for the Higher Education in Romania" opened the door for a new cycle of structural transformation for the Romanian higher education system. Launched in November 2008 and concluded in October 2011, the project set out to achieve a long-term vision (Horizon 2025) on the development of higher education in Romania, a vision created by the commitment of main stakeholders from within the system and the society. Under the title "Bucharest Dialogues", the project hosted an extensive foresight exercise, laying the groundwork for a set of educational policies in the development of higher

education, acting as a reference point for the strategic positioning of universities.

The objectives of the project are: building a long-term vision for the Romanian higher education system, supported by main stakeholders from within the system and the economy, by the society as a whole, a vision that will lay the groundwork for the academic system policies and will represent a landmark for the strategic positioning of universities, together with the development of leadership capacity at university level that will enable the build-up and pursuit of long-term objectives. Universities must diversify their study programs and personalise the educational routes of their students, for example – by organising programs based on alternative educational philosophies; by creating a module-based curriculum, opening alternative access paths towards the same diplomas, ensuring that bridges exist between these alternative routes; ensuring that the premature departure from a formal learning system is less risky and ulterior reintegration is not difficult, and among other, by recognising competences acquired outside formal education contexts.

Universities must expand their current offer of "traditional" programs (especially the BA and MA programs) with short-term programs, organised in a flexible manner, according to the institution's desire (or their eventual partners); these are closely connected to the market demand, both in terms of competences offered and the obtained funding; can be accredited or recognised by various means and mechanisms, or exclusively based on the prestige of the institution that makes them available; are fully integrated in the ECTS system; may be later extended with other short modules and programs, ultimately leading towards a traditional diploma.

These objectives can be achieved if a system of institutional liberties is in place, increasing institutional autonomy in essential matters, such as the organisation's structure, funding and

management of human resources; encouraging universities to draw up specific missions, that they can later follow in their own manner; reducing the centralised control on certain accreditation standards tailored to only one structure and rethinking quality assurance as a means to facilitate institutional improvement; rewarding professionalised management where results do not fail to appear, without imposing prescribed administrative procedures or formal standards and qualifications for the university managers.

## 7. Conclusions

What students expect from leaders is: the capacity of foresight, communication of information, involvement, energy, high expectations, and recognition of results, permanent individual and organisational dynamic, supporting differences and similarities.

Leadership is based on perspective, orientation and the conclusion of the leading process, looking to the future (foresight based leadership), or focused on establishing a strategy to be followed by the organisation for the achievement of its purposes (strategic leadership).

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